

**Submission
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INQUIRY INTO MANAGEMENT OF CAT POPULATIONS IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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Managing Cat Population in New South Wales

Strategies and Solutions by Melina Grin – Pet Nurture Director and Founder

Introduction

Cat populations should be managed via ethical, subsidised, community-based approaches focusing on long-term solutions. Successful management should have core education programs that proactively, as opposed to ‘reactively’, control cat populations and focus on responsible pet ownership.

This document outlines practical strategies and solutions based on anecdotal experience for managing and controlling the cat population in NSW.

Unowned cats are not ‘feral’ cats.

Unowned cats are not ‘feral’ for being unowned. It is impossible to distinguish between those with human owners and those who are lost, abandoned, or have never been ‘owned’. All may be seen as ‘stray’.

It would be a moral failing for governments to execute animals in mass simply because they cannot tell their story or are trying to survive. Instead, there could be effective ‘ethical’ approaches to managing existing cat populations and controlling future ones.

Strategies for Managing Cat Population

1. Spaying and Neutering Programs

Spaying and neutering is the most effective way to control the cat population. These programs reduce the number of unwanted litter and can be implemented through:

- Low-cost desexing or free clinics: Partnership with veterinary and animal welfare organisations to provide affordable spaying and neutering services in low socio-economic areas.
- Desexing by 5 months of age: Partnership with the veterinary community and shelters to encourage desexing between 4 and 5 months.
- Council initiatives aimed at subsidised or free neutering programs in low socio-economic areas.
- Cat education programs for pet owners and accessible by the community across equity groups: I run kitten kindergarten programs monthly. As part of this program, I influence cat owners to desex their cats by helping them set up neutering appointments and educating them on how spaying and neutering positively affect their

cat's health and behaviour. The Kitten Kindergarten program should become partially or fully government-subsidised to ensure cat owners within NSW sterilise their cats before they reach sexual maturity or by five months.

- Trap-Neuter-Return (TNR) programs: Capture feral cats, spay or neuter them, and then return them to their habitats. This helps stabilise the population and reduces the number of new kittens. I currently provide support to several TNR organisations, which has reduced the overall cat population within several districts.

2. Responsible Pet Ownership Initiatives

Educating the public about responsible pet ownership significantly impacts cat population control.

Initiatives should include:

- Microchipping and registration: All the cats who attended our kitten kindergarten education programs resulted in their pet cats being microchipped and council registered. The Kitten Kindergarten program should become mandatory as part of being a responsible pet parent or partially subsidised by the government.
- Indoor living: Our cat harness training initiatives have resulted in kittens and cats living indoors instead of wandering outdoors. Moreover, as part of our cat education services, I persuaded hundreds of cat parents to build cat enclosures or Catio's, preventing cats from prolific roaming, breeding, and hunting wildlife. Every cat owner should be educated to train them to walk outdoors on a harness and leash to minimise their cat running free and harming wildlife.
- Adoption over purchasing: I collaborate with several shelters and only promote the adoption of cats from shelters rather than buying from breeders, reducing the demand for bred cats and supporting homeless animals.
- Cat education programs: Our cat educational programs helped manage the cat population through downloadable resources, social media campaigns, training webinars, and enrichment resources, encouraging cat owners to keep their cats happy and safe at home. The government should fully subsidise these programs so we can also run them in schools.
- Vaccination and parasite control: Preventative veterinary treatments should be provided to protect the health and welfare of cats and reduce the incidence of zoonotic disease. I reinforce this and demonstrate its applications during my kitten kindergarten educational program.
- Educational message on television and radio across language groups: Radio and TV should raise awareness of responsible pet ownership and reproductive control in cats.

3. Implementing Legislation

Government legislation plays a crucial role in managing cat populations. Effective laws and regulations should include the following:

- Mandatory desexing: Mandatory de-sexing will significantly reduce future cat populations; however, it's hard to enforce unless pet owners are incentivised.
- Cat curfews and containment: Enforce curfews or containment laws to keep cats indoors during spring/summer and nighttime to protect wildlife. However, enforcement can prove challenging unless accompanied by owner education through our programs.

These laws, though, should not be used to penalise and kill cats who remain outdoors. Many outdoor colony cats are fed and looked after by people who cannot possibly contain the colonies in their own homes. Cats from colonies which someone looks after are also less likely to hunt and kill wildlife as their hunger needs are met.

- Penalties for abandonment: Impose strict penalties on owners who abandon their cats.
- Do not restrict the number of cats per household: Discouraging restrictions on the number of cats allowed per household, particularly in strata properties, is essential as long as all cats are microchipped, desexed, and kept contained. Changing the laws to increase the limit on cats in strata properties (from two to five) can encourage more cat adoptions.
- Cat-friendly rental accommodation: Many pet owners abandon or surrender their cats because they lack cat-friendly housing options. To address this issue, changes to tenancy laws and increased availability of cat-friendly rental accommodations should be implemented immediately to help reduce abandonment.

4. Community Involvement

Community involvement is essential for the success of cat population management programs. Strategies should include:

- Volunteer TNR programs: Encourage community volunteers to participate in TNR programs, helping to capture and care for feral cats.
- TNR and Trap, Neuter, and Rehome programs: Evaluate whether TNR programs are beneficial in reducing unowned cats and whether programs such as Trap, Neuter, and Rehome should also be implemented.
- Fostering and adoption programs: Establish foster care networks to house stray cats until they can be adopted temporarily.
- Public awareness campaigns: Run campaigns to educate the public about the importance of managing cat populations and responsible pet ownership.

5. Managing Other Stray Cat Populations

Specific strategies to manage unowned cat populations should include:

- Cat sanctuaries: Create designated sanctuaries where un-owned or stray cats can live without impacting local wildlife, or give more funding and support to animal charities which strive to do this.

Conclusion

Managing the cat population in New South Wales requires a multifaceted approach that includes spaying and neutering programs, community education programs like ours, responsible pet ownership initiatives, effective legislation, community involvement, and ethical management of unowned cats. By working together, we can protect the environment, significantly affect community education, and ensure the well-being of animals with and without human homes.